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New York

President:	Ms. Pierce	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Volgarev
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/762)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/762)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo; and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes.

Ms. Zerrougui and Ms. Furaha join today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa and Monseigneur Utembi joins it via video-teleconference from Kisangani.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/762, which contains a letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I would like to remind our briefers that while we are delighted to hear from them today, we would be very grateful if they could keep to the given time limits.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Security Council for affording me the opportunity to brief it on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly the latest developments in the electoral process under way in the country.

As I have already reported to the Council (see S/PV.8318), while preparations are ongoing for the upcoming presidential and national and provincial legislative elections, tangible progress has been seen in adhering to the critical stages of the calendar of the Independent National Electoral Commission. All political parties and groupings of the Majorité présidentielle and the opposition have put forward candidates for the three ballots within the timetable foreseen by the calendar, which is an important step towards holding the elections on 23 December. That phase of filing candidacies for the presidential and legislative elections has been marked by several events that warrant underlining.

First, President Kabila Kabange honoured his commitment not to stand for a third term. Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary was nominated as the sole candidate of the Majorité présidentielle under the banner of the Front commun pour le Congo.

Secondly, the President of the Ensemble pour le changement platform, Moïse Katumbi, was not able to submit his candidacy as he wished, since he was not able to return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo before the deadline of 8 August. Various reactions followed, ranging from the request by Mr. Katumbi's lawyers that the issue be referred to the Conseil d'État to the demand by opposition leaders, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the President of the Senate for his candidacy to be allowed to go forward.

Thirdly, according to the provisional list published by the Independent National Electoral Commission on 24 August, six of the 25 candidates for the presidential election were disqualified on various grounds, including the loss of nationality of origin, conflict of interest and a conviction for witness interference. They are Senator Jean-Pierre Bemba, three former prime ministers — Adolphe Muzito, Antoine Gizenga and Samy Badibanga — as well as Jean-Paul Moka-Ngolo and Marie Josée Ifoku.

Finally, it should be noted that, despite criteria within the revised electoral law that are deemed to be more restrictive, a large number of candidacies were registered. According to the final list submitted by the Independent National Electoral Commission, 19,640 candidates were registered for the provincial elections, while the provisional lists show 19 candidates for the presidential election and 15,222 candidates declared

admissible out of the 15,505 candidates for the national legislative elections.

The proportion of women candidacies has not changed since 2011, remaining at approximately 12 per cent of the total, or 2,318 for the provincial elections, 1,784 for the national legislative elections and none for the presidential election following the disqualification by the Independent National Electoral Commission of the only woman candidate.

In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) continues to provide technical assistance to the Independent National Electoral Commission in the organization of elections. The Mission also stands ready to provide logistical support to the process, should the Commission request it. As I have informed the Council in previous statements, the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Congolese authorities have repeatedly indicated that such logistical support would not be sought and that the Democratic Republic of the Congo wished to organize its elections without external logistical or financial support.

Despite the progress made and the assurances of the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission that elections will be held on 23 December, the period ahead will be marked by challenges and intense political consultations. The publication of the provisional list of candidates for the presidential and legislative elections has raised challenges and questions within the Congolese political class and society. The Independent National Electoral Commission is accused of having overstepped its boundaries by excluding candidates on the basis of interpretations of electoral law, which, according to those concerned, falls within the exclusive competence of the Constitutional Court. The contestation process is under way and the final lists of candidates are expected to be published on 19 September after appeals are considered by the Constitutional Court.

The lack of consensus on the use of voting machines and the failure to publish the final list of voters also remain two areas of major contention among the various stakeholders. I can only encourage those stakeholders to build on the constructive approach they took during the nomination period in order to pursue dialogue on those issues and resolve their differences. Of course, I remain determined to continue using my good offices to find solutions that build the confidence necessary for peaceful and inclusive elections.

(*spoke in English*)

The perceived credibility of the electoral process remains a key concern. The ongoing process of review and contestation, in particular of presidential candidates, by the Constitutional Court will be key to the legitimacy of the electoral process going forward. A lack of confidence or a perceived lack of credibility in the Independent National Electoral Commission or in the decisions of the Constitutional Court would serve only to heighten tensions in the process. Any impression that the Independent National Electoral Commission may have gone beyond its remit in the interpretation of the electoral law in determining the eligibility of candidates to stand in the elections would only undermine confidence in the process as a whole. It is hoped that the decisions of the Constitutional Court will help to resolve any ambiguities and instil confidence. The scrupulous applicability of the Constitution and electoral law is therefore key to moving forward.

The meaningful inclusion of a greater number of women in the electoral process is a priority if the spirit of resolution 1325 (2000) is to find meaning in the current political context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and if women are to play a role in the newly elected Government and legislatures, which resolution 1325 (2000) foresees. In that regard, supporting women candidates who will run in the elections and ensuring that women can vote freely and safely on election day is key.

The continued instances of targeted repression and intimidation of political activists and human rights defenders in certain provinces, as well as other restrictions on political space, do not instil confidence. Therefore, I continue to call for the lifting of the general ban on public demonstrations and upholding the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, which are crucial to making meaningful progress as elections draw nearer.

As elections approach, the deteriorating security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is also of concern. The activities of armed groups, the Mai Mai and militia could have an impact both on the final preparations for elections and on election day itself. While ensuring that the security of the elections remains the primary responsibility of the Government, MONUSCO will remain fully engaged in all areas of its

operations to support activities of the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in preventing and mitigating the activities of such groups.

With fewer than four months to go before elections are held, it is clear that the required levels of confidence and consensus around key issues must still be built. It is also imperative that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms be assured throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a consistent manner, so that, moving forward, all Congolese citizens can participate freely and fairly in all stages of the electoral process. Failure to allow for political engagement and participation, as foreseen by the Congolese Constitution, could jeopardize the peaceful nature and the credibility of the polls.

(*spoke in French*)

It is in that context that I reiterate my call on all stakeholders, in particular the Congolese authorities, to ensure that the elections on 23 December are credible and peaceful in order to allow for the first peaceable transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is an essential step on the path to stability and development in the country.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reiterate that MONUSCO stands ready to provide support for the elections, if need be.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing and offer of support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Monseigneur Utembi.

Monseigneur Utembi (*spoke in French*): The Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) sincerely thanks you, Madam President, for having invited it to brief Council members on developments in the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This demonstrates the confidence of the Security Council in the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. CENCO welcomed the invitation to participate in today's meeting, which is very important to the country in its quest for a peaceful solution to the sociopolitical crisis that began in 2016. That is why CENCO eagerly seized the opportunity to brief the members of the Security Council on developments in the electoral process under way in our country.

CENCO has duly noted the significant steps taken in the electoral process, such as the filing of candidacies for the presidential and legislative elections. Overall, the candidate nominations took place in a peaceful climate and a patriotic spirit, with the exception of the nomination of Mr. Moïse Katumbi. With regard to his nomination, we encourage the Government to respect the New Year's Eve agreement.

The appointment of candidates for the presidential election by the Majorité présidentielle was another positive step. CENCO commends the President of the Republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission, the political stakeholders and the people of the country as a whole for having contributed to the successful completion of that step, which facilitates peaceful dynamics at the highest level of the State.

The Government is committed to financing the electoral process. CENCO encourages the Government to continue financing to the end of the process within a time frame that will guarantee the effective holding of the elections on 23 December. Nonetheless, our current joy will have been illusory and fleeting if the ongoing electoral process does not lead to the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections, because if the elections are biased we will remain mired in crisis. We run the risk of such an outcome if we do not take into account the following concerns: first, the lack of clarification of the situation of the millions of people who have been registered without fingerprints; secondly, the lack of consensus concerning the use of voting machines; and thirdly, the failure to implement the important political de-escalation measures stipulated within the New Year's Eve agreement.

In view of the aforementioned facts, CENCO reiterates the following recommendations to the Independent National Electoral Commission and to the Government.

First, the provisional list of registered individuals should be published as soon as possible so that the Congolese people can be assured of the validity of individuals genuinely registered without fingerprints.

Secondly, consensus on the use of voting machines should be sought in order to promote the holding of tripartite talks between the Independent National Electoral Commission; the Majorité présidentielle, which is now called the Front commun pour le Congo; and the opposition, including national and international experts.

Thirdly, the New Year's Eve agreement should be fulfilled, inter alia, through the implementation of the remaining de-escalation measures aimed at preventing the misinterpretation of the law and the manipulation of justice to arbitrarily exclude certain candidates from running in the elections. Non-inclusive elections would be an obstacle to the process of achieving peace in the country.

Fourthly, the observation of the elections by national and international organizations that have relevant experience and express their wish to participate in the electoral process on 23 December should be facilitated. That would demonstrate that we have nothing to hide throughout the electoral process. The credibility of the elections depends to a great extent on the observation of those elections by national and international groups that are interested in doing so.

CENCO intends to contribute to the observation of the coming elections and hoprd to deploy 1,026 observers over the long term and 40,000 observers over the short term. It is counting on the support of the Independent National Electoral Commission to accredit all of those observers, who will be well trained, and to facilitate their important work, which will undoubtedly contribute to reducing tensions following the elections.

CENCO is very much counting on the involvement and commitment of the international community, in particular the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to peacefully overcome the crisis by respecting the stipulations of the New Year's Eve agreement.

The President: I thank Monseigneur Utembi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Furaha.

Ms. Furaha (*spoke in French*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Council for the opportunity it has given to the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which bears witness to the extent to which the Security Council attaches importance to women's role and their participation in public affairs. We also thank the various partners, including the Department for International Development, the National Democratic Institute and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which has always supported our involvement to ensure that we are able to carry out our work.

We are here today to speak about the participation of Congolese women in the electoral process and their role in it. First of all, we note that, during the 2006 elections, Congolese women were widely mobilized as voters, candidates, observers and witnesses in the hope of achieving a peaceful and developed Democratic Republic of the Congo with inclusive and participatory governance. Furthermore, we note that 52 per cent of women were registered to vote. In spite of the fact that less than 15 per cent of the candidates were women and their weak election results at the same rate, it should be noted that there was an important awareness-raising among women's awareness, who had a great opportunity to exercise their civil rights as voters, candidates, observers and witnesses.

The national and international stakeholders played a key role in that mobilization of women. The international community, through MONUSCO, played a lead role in the organization and holding of those elections. The fact that local and municipal elections, which had been expected to be an opportunity for women, were not held became a source of discouragement. Women voted more for men and their illiteracy negatively affected their choice.

From 2011 to 2018, we noticed a genuine decline in the motivation of citizens, in particular among women politicians and potential candidates. The reason for that discouragement can be found in various issues, including age-old customs, the lack of financial resources, political reasons and so forth. As voting cards served as identity cards, some women registered to vote in order to obtain an identity card, but not in order to actually vote, which had some consequences for female candidates.

The 2010 review of the Constitution and the fact that elections were not held in 2016 led to an impasse and political crisis and to debates about the legitimacy of President Joseph Kabila Kabange, the National Assembly and the Senate. That led to peace initiatives to defuse the crisis, including the New Year's Eve agreement. Unfortunately, however, we noted a weak representation of women, with only 18 per cent in the dialogues organized by the African Union and three women out of 32 participating in the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. We note that during

those processes, the number of women candidates remained below than 15 per cent.

The objective of the Rien Sans Les Femmes movement is to achieve gender equality in decision-making roles at all levels within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One of the first endeavours undertaken by the movement was to draw up a petition with over 207,315 signatures to the national Parliament to urge that the hurdles preventing women to participate as candidates in the elections be removed, in accordance with article 14 of the Constitution, on gender parity. Unfortunately, the response of the National Assembly was not encouraging and consequently, we saw a low percentage of women registered on the electoral lists and their last-minute adhesion to join other political parties that would accept them but woul.d not guarantee their election.

We are also seeing the weak democratization of some political parties and their inability to form a political elite that can assume the challenges of participative and inclusive governance, the non-implementation of the law on funding political parties, and provincial and national assemblies with a representation of less than 15 per cent of women since 2006. Despite the competence of some women politicians and candidates, the majority of the Congolese people remains hesitant to vote for women being able to vote. There is little funding for electoral expenses and campaigns, a lack of encouragement for voters to go out and vote for women, and an unfamiliarity with the voting machines among women. In that context, there are also other challenges and fears linked to the holding of democratic, transparent, free and peaceful elections in 2018.

We also note, in the context of the partnership between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community, that the Government has stated that it does not want to relive the experiences of the past, when funding was given with the intention of influencing the elections. That comment is concerning to the Congolese people since refusing external funding for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not encouraging. It is also worrying that there is a risk of accreditation being refused to international and even national observers, in some cases, as well as the mobilization of international partners to monitor the elections.

With respect to the challenges related to peace and security, there are fears about the willingness of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to guarantee the nationwide security of the elections and the prevention of gender-based violence before, during and after the elections, as well as concerns about the need to ensure free, transparent and peaceful elections so that the results will be accepted. We also note that the lack of consensus about the use of voting machines and the debates about voter registration remain disruptive. We must also underline that specific support for female candidates is particularly needed. Against that backdrop, we would like to make the following recommendations to our partners, the Security Council and the international community.

We recommend that the Congolese Government be encouraged to ensure the effective holding of free, transparent, democratic, inclusive and peaceful elections, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000), and urged to understand the importance of the international community's support in the organization of the elections so as to ensure that they are fully credible, as well as to prevent any electoral violence. We also recommend that it reactivate the logistical and security role of MONUSCO and persuade the majority and opposition political parties of the need for the elections to be effectively held.

We ask our international partners to support women and other civil society organizations in order to energize mobilization in favour of the participation of women in decision-making roles, and especially their election as candidates. We also support awareness-raising among voters, as well as training for male and female observers for the forthcoming elections.

To the Congolese Government, we recommend that it reassure the Congolese people about the effectiveness of the December elections, as well as the forthcoming local and municipal elections. We further recommend that it make the most of external partnerships to overcome the logistical and security challenges; ensure the safety and security of women before, during and after the elections so as to avoid the country falling into chaos; implement the law on funding given to political parties; and establish an interministerial committee and a national council on gender equality.

The President: I thank Ms. Furaha her for her very helpful briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank my friends from the French delegation for allowing me to speak, as I have to leave early. I thank the briefers for updating the Security Council on elections planning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for calling this very important and timely meeting because we are, in fact, running out of time.

Today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is 118 days away from election day. That is less than four months for the Government to finish organizing free, fair and credible elections. Fortunately, we have already reached an important milestone. President Kabila did not register as a presidential candidate before the deadline, which guarantees that he cannot legally stand for re-election or legitimately serve as President past January 2019. The United States welcomes reports of President Kabila's intent not to seek a third term. That is an important step towards the peaceful transition of power. History will look favourably on President Kabila's decision if it culminates in free, fair and credible elections that translate into a lasting democracy for the Congolese people — a legacy that we hope he earns in the coming months.

While we recognize progress, we cannot deny the red flags and unanswered questions that remain. With less than four months to go, how will the Independent National Electoral Commission transport elections materials to more than 90,000 polling places? Will there be enough voting machines or will authorities extend voting by days, or even weeks? Can the authorities recharge voting machines with only a 12-hour battery life? Have election organizers widely tested the machines? Will voters, many of whom have never used a touch screen, know how to use them? Are organizers preparing paper ballots as a backup if the electronic voting machines fail? Those questions raise problems, but there are solutions.

The Congolese authorities should permit the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical and transportation support. MONUSCO has the available assets that the Mission is ready and willing to deploy. The Congolese authorities should also let voters use paper ballots. That is a trusted, tested, transparent and easy-to-use voting method. The Democratic Republic of the Congo can and should use *the same operations* that it successfully implemented in 2006 and 2011, including with support from the United Nations. Paper ballots were good enough to get President Kabila elected, and they should be good enough as a fail-safe means to elect his successor.

I had the opportunity to meet with President Kabila last year. If he were here today, I would tell him that it is admirable that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo wants to self-finance and self-support its elections. But is it doable? Is it realistic? Is it even necessary? It does not insult the Democratic Republic of the Congo's sovereignty for the Independent National Electoral Commission to accept logistical support from MONUSCO. Instead, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is wasting precious resources to buy capabilities that are already available to it.

Meanwhile, my Government and others are devoting tens of millions of dollars to life-saving humanitarian assistance for the country. It is troubling that President Kabila and the Independent National Electoral Commission refused the assistance. We respect the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a sovereign State Member of the United Nations, but it cannot help but raise suspicion when the Congolese Government refuses the assistance that would help make free, fair and credible elections a reality, while at the same time it continues to accept the humanitarian assistance that so many of us continue to provide it with.

Other red flags add to our suspicions. We are deeply concerned about the Independent National Electoral Commission's decision on 24 August to disqualify some opposition presidential candidates for what appear to be political reasons. This is not how an electoral process or any independent electoral commission should function. We also praise those candidates who feel that they have been unjustly disqualified for using the appeals process that was open to them. By abiding by the rules of the domestic process, opposition and civil society organizations further reinforced just how much independence the Independent National Electoral Commission has lost during Mr. Nangaa's tenure.

The National Assembly President also continues to deny the wish of an opposition party to replace its candidate for the Independent National Electoral Commission, in violation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. The Minister of Justice continues to detain dozens of opposition members and civil society activists, again in violation of the agreement. There must be a political space for candidates to campaign, citizens to assemble and opposition members to speak

freely and without fear. There can be no violence, intimidation, harassment or silencing of the opposition. Political parties must be able to compete on a level playing field.

We will never know the will of the Congolese people without an environment conducive to elections. We have 118 days. These problems are fixable. There is still enough time. The suspicions we have may amount to nothing. Ultimately, however, the Congolese Government must choose. The hopes for self-determination of more than 80 million Congolese citizens are riding on the decisions that President Kabila and the Independent National Electoral Commission will make in the days and weeks ahead. Now is the time for choosing. We ask them to choose support from MONUSCO, choose free fair and credible elections on 23 December, and choose a peaceful transition of power in January 2019, and in so doing choose a better future for generations of Congolese people to come.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her excellent briefing and more generally for her exemplary commitment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also thank the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, whose involvement is essential to the success of the electoral process, for his extremely clear briefing. Lastly, I thank Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes, for her role in fighting for women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their participation in the political and electoral processes.

The 23 December elections will be a historic moment for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that they will ensure a peaceful transfer of power for the first time in the country's history. For the country, it offers a unique opportunity to make a lasting commitment to achieving peace and stability. Those elections belong to the Congolese people. France reaffirms its full respect for the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and encourages the Government to take all measures necessary to ensure a smooth electoral process and the holding of free, inclusive and transparent elections, in accordance with the set timetable and the Constitution. The success of that crucial step in the political history of the country is the shared responsibility and commitment of all. It is therefore up to all stakeholders to maintain the spirit of dialogue and consensus resulting from the 31 December 2016 agreement. I will emphasize two essential conditions on which the success of the electoral process depends.

The first concerns the fact that it must take place in an environment of trust. The opening of political and democratic space, as well as respect for fundamental freedoms — beginning with the freedom of expression and demonstration — are essential. France calls on the Congolese Government to lift the general ban on demonstrations and to release political prisoners as soon as possible, in accordance with the de-escalation measures provided for in the New Year's Eve agreement, as Monseigneur Utembi recalled earlier. In that regard, respect for human rights and the commitments made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Human Rights Council in Geneva are of the utmost importance. France also encourages the Congolese authorities to ensure the participation of women in the political process, from which they continue to be excluded too often, as the statistics cited by Ms. Zerrougui earlier highlight.

Respect for the electoral calendar is essential. The trust of the Congolese people depends largely on that factor. Elections must be held on the scheduled date in accordance with the commitment of all parties. France welcomes the legislative and technical progress reflected in the publication of the provisional list of candidates by the Independent National Electoral Commission on the evening of 24 August. Furthermore, we welcome once again President Kabila's decision not to run again in accordance with the Constitution. In order to maintain this positive dynamic, any consideration of altering the electoral calendar must be avoided at all costs.

The next step will be for the Constitutional Court to consider appeals concerning candidatures invalidated by the Independent National Electoral Commission, which must be submitted in the coming days before the publication of the definitive list on 19 September. The decisions of the Court must allow an environment of trust in the electoral process to be preserved, while inclusiveness will be an important factor in the success of the elections. Moreover, France fully respects the sovereign decision of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assume the responsibility of financing and logistical support for the holding of elections. It nevertheless recalls that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is ready to provide the Democratic Republic of the Congo with

logistical support if needed. To that end, it is essential that the competent authorities provide MONUSCO with the information it needs to provide timely support as appropriate.

Technical issues have yet to be resolved. France calls once again on the Independent National Electoral Commission to establish a wider consensus on the use of voting machines by helping all citizens to access and grow comfortable with them. Moreover, we encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to implement the recommendations made by the International Organization of la Francophonie in its June audit, beginning with the publication of the voter register, on which 6.6 million people are registered without finger prints. Far from being anecdotal, that technical point raises an issue relating to the credibility of the entire process.

The second condition concerns the fact that elections must take place within a peaceful environment. France remains concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In some regions, the situation is likely to call into question the electoral process. Tensions in the Kasai have claimed many lives, while experts commissioned by the Human Rights Council have reported allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The situation in the east of the country, particularly in North and South Kivu, remains extremely worrying and all the more sensitive since the new Ebola epidemic, which was declared on 1 August in the Beni area. In that connection, France welcomes MONUSCO deployments in areas of violence, especially in the eastern part of the country. It is essential to continue to reconfigure MONUSCO so as to strengthen the protection of civilians. Securing future elections and providing logistical support for them, if the authorities so desire, must be MONUSCO's short-term priority.

France stands shoulder to shoulder with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With its partners in the Security Council, the African Union and in the region as a whole, it will remain committed to ensuring that the electoral process leads to the holding of elections that are free, credible, transparent and inclusive. Beyond the deadlines in December, it is the very future of the country that is at stake in the months to come — a future, we hope, of stability, development and peace.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and the noteworthy briefings by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Monseigneur Marcel Utembi and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha. We would also like to express our gratitude for the important work they undertake in their respective domains.

Peru is closely monitoring progress against the electoral calendar in the Democratic Republic of the Congo under the leadership of the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission. We underscore the need to ensure that December's electoral process is legitimate, democratic, credible, inclusive and peaceful. In this regard, we welcome the decision of President Joseph Kabila not to seek re-election. We believe that it is vital that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, be kept informed about the process so as to support the Congolese Government and citizens in their efforts to ensure that the process is a success and to build sustainable peace.

The process clearly involves a number of significant challenges that must be overcome. In our view, a deadline must urgently be set for an audit of the voting machines and to devise alternative plans developed in case the machines do not function correctly or difficulties arise in their use. To that end, we appreciate the proposal put forward by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo that a team of independent technical experts could ensure that the machines work correctly. Likewise, the Government could detail the logistical support it may require from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the timely transfer of electoral material. We also view as valid the recommendation of the International Organization of la Francophonie regarding the need for the prompt publication of the list of voters so as to allow for its verification and amendment if necessary, thereby ensuring the necessary climate of trust in the process.

All of this should take place in the context of strict respect by the Government for the free exercise of the political rights of all political groups and citizens in general, and pursuant to the electoral code of conduct. In this regard, we are particularly concerned about the fact that draft legislation on confidence-building measures has not been considered, including the draft amendments to the 2015 law on public demonstrations. In this regard, we encourage the Congolese authorities and all political actors to step up efforts to promote the

broad participation of women in the electoral process as candidates and as voters, and in the political life of the country in general. Evidence shows that the participation of women and young people makes a decisive contribution to building sustainable peace based on a shared vision of the future.

I conclude by highlighting the important support role played by MONUSCO, the African Union, subregional organizations and neighbouring countries in ensuring that the electoral process can be a turning point towards peace, progress and development in this country.

Mr. Volgarev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, for the updated information on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the implementation of the December political agreement and the election preparations. We also note the briefings delivered by the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the representative of civil society. We regret that we were not able to hear from the head of the Congolese Independent National Electoral Commission.

We agree that timely elections on 23 December would allow for a reduction of political tensions in the country. We understand that the technical and legislative preparations for the voting in December are consistent with the Independent National Electoral Commission calendar. We note the measures taken by Kinshasa, including the timely adoption of laws distributing seats in provincial legislative bodies and local councils, as well as the publication of a list of parties permitted to run in the elections and other associations.

We welcome the audit of the electoral list conducted under the auspices of the International Organization of la Francophonie and the fact that half of the political parties in the country have signed up to an electoral code of conduct. We note President Kabila's statement before the National Assembly in July, at which the Congolese leader once again restated his commitment to respecting the national Constitution.

Finally, the registration process for presidential candidates has very recently come to a close. As Council members will be aware, the Front commun pour le Congo has put forward one candidate: Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary. We believe that these signals are appropriate and timely, and encourage opposition parties to refrain from pushing a negative agenda. We call on colleagues not to demonize the decision of the Congolese Independent National Electoral Commission to use electronic voting machines. We agree that in order to avoid any problems in the electoral process, Kinshasa must guarantee its sustainable financing.

We respect the decision of the Congolese Government to support this process mainly on its own resources, while we also draw attention to the potential logistical support that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo could offer.

We do not rule out the need for the Congolese authorities to update their implementation of confidence-building measures, including on the significant aspects of the political agreement regarding high-profile cases against political actors abroad. However, we encourage all opposition parties in the Republic to work with Kinshasa and the Independent National Electoral Commission to avoid any outbreak of violence. It is, moreover, imperative in our view that the national sovereignty and legislation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo be respected.

It is our understanding that the role of the United Nations Mission in organizing and holding elections should not go beyond the mandate anchored in resolution 2409 (2017). The protection of civilians in the electoral context should be carried out with full observance of basic peacekeeping principles and without interference in the domestic affairs of Kinshasa. We believe that it is up to the Congolese people themselves decide their own fate, and that the objective of the international community should be to provide assistance in those areas where it is genuinely necessary.

Elections alone are no panacea. We must focus on addressing the root causes of the crisis, and on the need to continue the fight against illegal armed groups in the east of the country, which continue to pose a threat to the civilian population.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting at the request of several Council members, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands. I thank the briefers for the enlightening information they have provided on the election preparations. I reiterate our support for Special Representative Leila Zerrougui.

Today, I will address three main points: electoral preparations; the implementation of the

New Year's Eve agreement; and the support of the international community.

My first point relates to the electoral preparations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes President Kabila's decision not to seek a third term, in accordance with the Congolese Constitution. This represents a crucial step in preparing for elections. We also welcome the recent increased engagement on the part of the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties, and we welcome the creation of additional provincial courts of appeal.

Nonetheless, much remains to be done to ensure that the elections are free, credible, transparent and peaceful. It is essential that all parties have confidence in the Commission and in the electoral preparations. A number of political parties have expressed concerns regarding key steps, including the timely delivery, storage and distribution of voting machines, as well as their use. Furthermore, the means for a citizens' audit of the electoral list are still not clearly established. Those are all significant challenges for the Commission, and we encourage all parties to commit to dialogue in order to resolve them. We note with satisfaction that the Congolese Government has funded a part of the electoral budget. However, it is essential that the remaining funds be transferred on time. We would like to know whether Mr. Nangaa believes the electoral budget will be covered. We emphasize the willingness of the international community to provide logistical support. We encourage Commission and the Government to make the relevant requests by the deadlines. We regret that the head of the Commission, Mr. Nangaa, had to cancel his participation in this briefing.

My second point has to do with the importance of the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement, which is incumbent upon all signatory Congolese parties. That agreement is the only possible way for the elections to be accepted by the entire Congolese population. Consequently, the continued lack of significant progress in the implementation of de-escalation measures is a cause for serious concern. All candidates must be able to participate under equal conditions of competition. The electoral process must be inclusive. CENI has deemed six candidates ineligible. We call on all stakeholders to continue to show maximum restraint pending the results of any appeals. We urge the authorities to ensure that the process is inclusive.

Another critical step is the liberation of all political prisoners, including emblematic cases. I would like to note that prisoners of conscience, including the five members of Filimbi, have been denied their right to a fair trial.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is also gravely concerned by the low level of women's participation, as was underscored by Ms. Zerrougui and Ms. Solange LwashigaFuraha. Women comprise 12 per cent of candidates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a setback for the region. Certain political parties have no female candidates. Ms. Lwashiga Furaha's evidence, however, that the country does not lack female leaders. We call on all parties to intensify their efforts to include Congolese women in the electoral process.

My third and final point is on the will of the international community to support the Congolese people. In addition to the electoral process, the fight against the new Ebola epidemic in the east of the country also requires international support. Combined with the serious security risks, this new epidemic could easily devolve into a new humanitarian disaster. All Member States must do all they can to prevent an escalation of the crisis. We welcome that the Council will have an opportunity to discuss the situation tomorrow morning.

In conclusion, the Council's upcoming visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo next October will be one of solidarity with the Congolese people. It will take place at a key moment. With the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other relevant stakeholders, the Council will continue to work alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo throughout this crucial year. We cannot simply look away.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for her insightful briefing. I also extend our appreciation to the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monsignor Marcel Utembi, and the representative of Rien Sans Les Femmes, Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, for their highly informative updates.

We reiterate the importance of implementing the 31 December 2016 political agreement by all parties. In that regard, we welcome the recent announcement by President Joseph Kabila not to run for re-election.

which is an important step towards a peaceful transition of power.

We also note the importance of organizing fair, transparent and inclusive elections as scheduled. This nation-owned process should be held with respect for the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We welcome the efforts of the national authorities and the Independent National Electoral Commission to prepare the elections in accordance with the electoral calendar, including the finalization of the voter register, as well as the list of candidates for presidential and legislative elections. We positively note and encourage further interaction of the Commission to settle disputes with all the participants in the political process.

We call on the Congolese authorities to continue implementing measures to create conditions conducive to holding credible elections, including the meaningful participation of women. Further efforts must be made to establish a constructive and inclusive inter-Congolese dialogue, to achieve political progress and to build confidence in the electoral process, including its technical elements. We welcome the committed determination of the Government to assume full responsibility for funding the elections. We encourage national authorities to continue cooperating with the Commission to provide the necessary resources.

At the same time, we note the readiness of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical assistance in preparing for the elections, and we call for increased cooperation between the Independent National Electoral Commission and MONUSCO. It is very important to eliminate in good time the potential procedural, technical and logistic difficulties, which can jeopardize the results of both the political and electoral processes. We commend MONUSCO for providing considerable assistance in preparation for the elections. It is also important for the Congolese authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure security during the elections, with the support of MONUSCO.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a decisive phase that will determine its future. In that regard, we call on all regional and subregional organizations, as well as neighbouring States, to continue to promote the political and electoral process to ensure favourable conditions for holding timely and peaceful elections, which will have positive consequences for stability throughout the region.

Mr. Lie Cheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zarrougui and the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monseigneur Utembi, for their briefings. We also listened carefully to the statement of Ms. Furaha on behalf of civil society.

Peace, stability and the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has attracted the attention of the international community, particularly that of the countries of the region. Lately, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been generally stable, and the preparations for the general elections are progressing steadily. The Security Council should fully recognize and support the elections and provide constructive assistance to the country. The forthcoming general elections constitute a critical step in the political process of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The electoral support provided by the international community should respect the genuine needs of the country and correspond to the real situation on the ground.

China has always believed that a political solution is the only way to resolve the issues of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council should continue to support the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional organizations, as well as countries in the region, by playing a leading role in mediation and by encouraging those organizations and countries to enhance communication and engagement with Congolese parties through their respective channels. In particular, the focus should be on listening to the views of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and respecting its ownership of the political process, while also encouraging all parties to take concrete actions to return to a path of political settlement through dialogue and consultations and on effectively implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016.

While providing assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the international community should ensure that its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity are fully respected. We should help the country to strengthen its own security capabilities so that it can achieve peace and stability independently.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) should function strictly in accordance with its mandate and strengthen consultations with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

China has always played an active and constructive role with regard to matters concerning peace and security in Africa and has always supported African countries in seeking African solutions to African issues. The 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit will be held in Beijing on 3 and 4 September under the theme "Towards an even stronger community with a shared future through win-win cooperation". Leaders from China and African countries will meet in Beijing to discuss plans for future cooperation and to propose new measures to strengthen comprehensive cooperation between China and Africa.

China has always supported the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and has actively participated in peacekeeping operations there. We have also provided humanitarian assistance, including medicine and food, to the country and have actively participated in its socioeconomic development. China stands ready to work with the international community to continue to play a constructive role in achieving peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to begin by extending my thanks to the briefers: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo; and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes, for their informative briefings.

The election process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering its final phase. In that regard, we welcome President Joseph Kabila Kabange's decision to respect the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to step down at the end of the year.

The timely holding of the elections is crucial to ensuring the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore call on the Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission and all stakeholders to work together towards the holding of elections in December, with full respect for the Constitution and the 31 December 2016 agreement. Close cooperation with civil society, in particular women's representatives, and women's involvement in the electoral process are crucial to ensuring equal the representation of women and men in decision-taking at all levels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Rien Sans Les Femme aimed at ensuring the broadest possible participation of women in the upcoming elections and at supporting female candidates.

Poland also reiterates its call for the peaceful and timely transfer of power in January 2019, as set out in the electoral calendar and in accordance with the Congolese Constitution.

We strongly believe that the effective implementation of the December agreement, including confidence-building measures, as well as compliance with the electoral timeline, is essential to a peaceful and credible electoral process. Respect for fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, is crucial to a democratic transition of power and the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It goes without saying that the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant impact on the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. A peaceful and developing Congo could provide a huge boost to the whole continent.

Finally, let me reiterate our full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as to the men and women of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Allow me to begin by thanking the briefers for their comprehensive update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend their tireless efforts, and we express our full support for their challenging and important tasks ahead of the 23 December presidential, legislative and provincial elections.

We welcome the progress made in the technical preparations of those elections. The registration of candidates was an important milestone, and we note the list of approved presidential and parliamentary candidates presented by the Independent National Electoral Commission over the weekend. The announcement by President Kabila Kabange that he intends to abide by the Constitution and not to seek another term is particularly welcome.

The remaining technical challenges must now be addressed in a timely manner. In that regard, efforts to ensure women's full and equal participation in the political processes must be stepped up. It was disappointing that only a small number of women were registered as candidates for the provincial and legislative elections. While lessons for the future should be drawn from that failure, we now need to focus on supporting the candidates who are registered and on providing conditions that allow for women to actively participate in the process ahead and to cast their votes in a free and secure manner on election day. Such efforts should include support, encourage women in the voter registration process and guarantee voting free from pressure, such as ensuring individual access to voting cards, informing individuals of their voting rights and guaranteeing safe access to polling stations. With regard to supporting women candidates, initiatives should be supported so as to prevent sexual attacks, sexual harassment and gender-based sabotage of the campaigns of women candidates. To that end, we encourage the authorities and the United Nations to coordinate closely with the relevant civil society organizations, including in order to better understand the issues as they arise and to make sure that citizens are well informed.

Technical preparations are not enough to secure free, fair and credible elections. The current security situation, with the continued high levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and other human rights violations and abuses, must also be addressed. There is an urgent need to ensure the opening of political space for parties and civil society and to respect freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. In that regard, the implementation of confidence-building measures, as per the December 2016 agreement, remains of critical importance. Trust in the electoral process among all stakeholders will be key to the credibility of the elections.

The joint communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Security Council of July (SC/13430), as well as the joint communiqué of the AU, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of Africa and the United Nations on the Peace and Security Cooperation Framework, demonstrates the firm international consensus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The message is clear: the world expects the holding of credible and inclusive elections in December, leading to a democratic and peaceful transfer of power. It is now important that the Council continue to work closely and actively with the region to ensure that that common objective is achieved.

United Nations support to the electoral process is critical. The continued active engagement of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, making full use of her good offices, will be essential, and we should give the Special Representative of the Secretary-General our full support. We note the ambitious intentions of the Independent National Electoral Commission to provide logistics, and we encourage the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue to prepare for assisting the authorities in that massive undertaking, if needed. Support from the United Nations should, however, always be dependent on national efforts so as to ensure the credibility of the process.

Finally, the Ebola virus outbreak in North Kivu last week is deeply concerning. As we know, the security situation in that region is dire, providing a very complex operating environment for the needed response. Given that it is also a populous region, hosting more than 1 million internally displaced persons, with international borders, it is a situation that deserves our full attention. We painfully learned from the outbreak in West Africa in 2014 that such epidemics can also risk having implications for peace and security. Sweden has therefore requested an update by the World Health Organization on the situation in the Security Council tomorrow, and will continue to follow the situation closely.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia is grateful for the briefings by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Monsignor Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson of the civil society organization Rien Sans Les Femmes, whom we commend for her work and that of her organization to ensure the participation of Congolese women at all levels, in particular their work to ensure women's participation in the upcoming elections.

We highlight the continued progress and commitment shown by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meeting the deadlines set by the electoral calendar, in particular with regard to its inclusive work on candidate registration by formally inviting all political parties and, subsequently, by opening offices for the reception and management of candidatures. In that regard, we hope that all legally qualified candidates can participate in the upcoming elections in a transparent, credible, inclusive and timely environment conducive to a peaceful transfer of power.

We commend the Government on providing additional funds to the Commission électorale nationale indépendante to enable it to conduct its duties. We also commend the Commission on coordinating logistical and operational matters with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and encourage it to continue such coordination and training on the use of voting machines, in particular in remote areas.

The international community must continue working to strengthen the capacities of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to meet coordination and logistics challenges in the upcoming elections, while respecting the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We reiterate that, for elections to bring about a peaceful transfer of Government and political tensions to be defused, parties must implement the confidence-building measures stipulated in the 2016 New Year's Eve political agreement, whose full and effective implementation we once again advocate. Both the Government and the opposition must work together in order to make progress on such measures.

We call on all parties to work together ahead of the elections, in which the full participation of women and young people is essential. We must step up our efforts to ensure that women have a meaningful place in all political processes, including in the areas of prevention, negotiation, mediation and peacebuilding. Building societies that promote gender equality makes peace processes inclusive and leads to sustainable peace. If women are not the main actors in such processes, we will not achieve genuine peace.

We welcome the support of regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, and of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region in preparing for the elections. We encourage them to continue working together, in close coordination with the Government. Similarly, we commend the work of the Southern African Development Community and MONUSCO, which provide positive support for the holding of elections. We encourage them to continue their cooperation with the Commission électorale nationale indépendante.

We are convinced that the Congolese people and institutions must make the decisions on the future of their country. We see that as a decisive factor in promoting peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Similarly, we believe that, in order to achieve structural change, leading to stability and the strengthening of the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed, one of which is the country's lack of control over its own natural resources. The sovereign administration of national wealth is paramount in order to ensure stability and the rule of law.

Lastly, we express our solidarity with the victims of the Ebola outbreak and commend the Congolese authorities, the international community and the World Health Organization for their swift response to the health crisis.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank all today's briefers — Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Furaha — for their valuable briefings.

Today's meeting follows the announcement of President Joseph Kabila Kabange of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that he will not run for the presidential elections scheduled to be held on 23 December. We welcome that important step and the other positive steps that were recently made in the political process, including the registration of candidates for presidential and legislative elections and the respect shown by President Kabila for the Constitution and the New Year's Eve political agreement.

Given the recent positive steps taken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during this month, and nearly four months ahead of the presidential elections, which we hope will be held on time and without delay, we would like to take the opportunity of today's meeting to reiterate the content of the press statement issued by the Security Council (SC/13455)

on 13 August. The press statement underscored the importance of a commitment by all the Congolese political actors and the institutions responsible for organizing the elections to prepare for the success of the electoral process, leading to a peaceful transfer of power, in accordance with the Constitution and the New Year's Eve political agreement. The statement also called on Congolese stakeholders to create the necessary conditions in order to ensure an environment conducive to peaceful and inclusive political activities, and to hold free, fair, transparent and conclusive elections with the participation of all Congolese during every stage of the elections. The statement reiterated the importance of taking measures to help confidence-building and respect for the fundamental rights and the elections timetable.

In the light of such preparations by the Congolese Government and the Commission électorale nationale indépendante, we encourage them to request the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide logistical and technical support, especially since the Government intends to use electronic voting on the election day for the first time.

I would like to underscore the importance of the commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is a large country with a large population and very rich in natural resources. It is the heart of the African continent and the neighbouring countries. Its security and political stability has undoubtedly an impact on that of the neighbouring countries and the whole region.

Finally, working closely with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and other main organizations and regional stakeholders would contribute to the implementation of the New Year's Eve political agreement and the success of the upcoming electoral process.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her comprehensive briefing and ongoing efforts as Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also thank Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the National Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Solange Furaha, Spokesperson of civil society organization Rien Sans les Femmes, for their respective updates on the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular preparations for the December elections.

I am honoured to make this statement on behalf of the three African countries represented on the Security Council, whose group Equatorial Guinea is currently coordinating.

We all agree that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture. While reaffirming the sovereignty of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its institutions, leadership of the electoral process and ultimate responsibility to conduct the process effectively, the Security Council must closely follow developments in the country with a view to preparing for successful elections in December. We welcome the recent milestones and successes, including the peaceful completion of voter registration, the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court and the establishment of additional provincial appellate courts where they did not previously exist. The finalization of the registration of candidates for the next presidential elections is already a historic achievement. In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation to President Joseph Kabila Kabange for his contribution to the successful conclusion of the registration of candidates for the presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We recommend that the remaining challenges related to confidence-building measures be addressed by the relevant institutions and authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as soon as possible.

We note with concern the small number of registered female candidates — only 12 per cent — and hope that they will receive the necessary support in the run-up to the elections to ensure meaningful participation by women in the country's political system. As we all know, the success of the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will depend upon the inclusiveness of the electoral process and on the commitment of all political stakeholders, whom we urge to reject all forms of violence and exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from provocative actions to avoid escalating tensions. We therefore recommend that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all relevant actors work in a spirit of cooperation and commitment to ensure a historic moment that leads to the first peaceful transfer of political power in the country.

Congolese actors must set common and well-deserved goals to move the country forward.

In that spirit, the ability of the Independent National Electoral Commission to meet the electoral calendar will remain a priority to ensure a peaceful, credible and transparent electoral process. That is a critical and determining factor in ensuring positive results that will lead to a democratic transfer of political power in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and no efforts should be spared in implementing the electoral calendar. Measures, including by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), will need to be taken against all spoilers or negative forces whose actions threaten the implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement and the holding of elections. In the meantime, the most important factor in preparing for the elections is the implementation of the agreement, which is the only viable means of easing tensions. We therefore once again call on the Government, stakeholders and national actors to continue their efforts to create conditions conducive to the holding of credible and peaceful elections on the basis of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the New Year's Eve agreement.

With regard to funding and logistical and technical support for the elections, all needs must be met through actions by the institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, the doubts about the use of the voting machines and all related issues, including transport, staff training and energy supplies, must be laid to rest at the appropriate time. We hope that will include the timely use of logistical support available from MONUSCO scheduled for 26 July 2018. We hope that the Congolese authorities will make use of the appropriate facilities that can contribute to the successful organization of credible and transparent elections.

We emphasize that an appropriate environment must be in place in order for the elections to be held successfully. Therefore, the adoption and implementation of confidence-building measures are essential. In that regard, we are concerned about the continuing discrepancies with regard to the operation and use of voting machines and electoral lists. Those and other differences could undermine and seriously damage the credibility of the whole electoral process, if those issues are not addressed properly with due seriousness during the pre-election period. The consequences could be catastrophic given the possible post-electoral scenarios. It is therefore imperative to adopt preventive and support measures to ensure the building and strengthening of lasting peace in the country. The Commission must carry out awareness-raising campaigns aimed at all stakeholders and public opinion in order to build confidence with regard to those machines.

Addressing the problem of the a lack of tangible progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures, as reflected in the Secretary-General's update (S/2018/762, annex), is a necessary condition for the success of the elections. There is already a precedent in which the Commission and the political parties have engaged in a constructive dialogue. While we commend those initiatives, we would like to encourage all actors to follow the same path in addressing future challenges.

Activities in the coming months will be of crucial importance for the final preparations for the 2018 elections. It is essential that all Congolese parties make the necessary commitments to preserve the ongoing dialogue and consensus to facilitate the peaceful holding of elections. In that regard, it is important that the Council send a clear and unified message to all Congolese political actors.

It is also imperative that we emphasize the need for better coordination among the United Nations, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international and regional partners to ensure more coherent and effective support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council's next visit to the country, which is scheduled for October is a very welcome initiative. We trust that the African Union Peace and Security Council will participate in that visit.

Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will not be possible if we do not examine the reasons that have led to this situation, such as the thorny issue of the financing of different armed groups active in the country, which has led this immense, beautiful and rich country to go through very difficult situations. The country's resources must be used for the development of its immense potential and for the benefit of its people.

With regard to Ebola, approximately six weeks ago, we were relieved to hear that the most recent pandemic had been brought under control. A new outbreak has just been announced, and we therefore express our concern and wish that it will be quickly and effectively

brought under control and that this situation does not have an impact on either the preparations or the elections themselves.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I too would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Furaha for their really helpful briefings. I think the whole Council has benefited from being able to hear from them. I also thank the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for all the work it does to try to bring peace and stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I just wanted to say that I think that, at this crucial time, it is important that the Security Council receive information from key players. We are therefore, like others, disappointed that the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was unable to join this briefing.

We very much share the concern about women's participation, which the representatives of Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea, in particular, set out so clearly after Ms. Furaha's briefing. We have noted the continuing progress on the electoral calendar, the closure of the application process for presidential candidates and the confirmation that President Kabila Kabange will not run for a third term. As others have said, that is a critical step forward, and it will help ensure that credible and inclusive elections in December lead to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's first-ever democratic and peaceful transition of power. That is an immense prize, but it is still a vulnerable one.

Ambassador Haley set out forcibly how we are still four months from elections and there is a long way to go. This about more than the timeline; it is about creating the conditions for free and fair elections. We join others in calling on the Government to implement the New Year's Eve agreement in full, and that includes the confidence-building measures, to demonstrate its credibility and potential for government. We also look to the opposition to engage constructively. The electoral process should be transparent and proactively address the concerns of Congolese civil society. I would like to make three points in that regard.

First, we call on the Independent National Electoral Commission to clarify election protocols to enable effective observation and to address concerns around the electoral register and the voting machines. Many representatives today have set out those difficulties in full and we endorse their concerns.

Secondly, we note that the Commission has refused logistical assistance from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to organize the elections, and we therefore urge the Commission to clarify its logistical plan or to accept MONUSCO's assistance urgently.

Thirdly, inclusivity is a vital element in building trust in elections. We note with concern the lack of confidence of several opposition parties in the electoral process following the release of the provisional list of presidential candidates. Elections need to be fully inclusive and they need to see the engagement of all the Congolese people.

It is clear that the Democratic Republic of the Congo faces many challenges and those have had a devastating effect upon the population. A number of speakers today referred to the violations of human rights across the country, the link between political uncertainty and instability and the other drivers of violence, which the ongoing Ebola crisis risks exacerbating. We share those concerns and hope that they can be addressed. I call again for the New Year's Eve agreement to be implemented fully. Delays in elections and a lack of public trust only risk further violence. That will have an effect not just on the Democratic Republic of the Congo but risks destabilizing the wider region too.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): As your presidency of the Security Council comes to an end, Madam President, allow me congratulate you on the way you have conducted the meetings during the month and thank you for taking the initiative to organize today's meeting, which addresses the evolution of the electoral process in my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's thanks to the members of the Security Council for the ongoing interest and support they have always shown the situation in my country.

After having followed the various statements of the speakers who preceded me, it seems important to me, on behalf of my Government, to express our understanding of the situation that is the subject of our discussions. Before continuing my remarks, I would like to apologize for the absence of the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, who, because of his busy schedule, could not be here today.

To return to our topic of the day, as we reported last month before the Council (see S/PV.8318), the electoral process has evolved sufficiently. As of today, the deadline to submit candidatures has passed. It should be noted in that regard that the Commission received 19,437 applications for the provincial elections, 15,222 for the legislative elections and 25 for the presidential election.

With particular regard to the presidential election, as those present have followed, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Republic, has kept his word, thereby complying with the declaration to respect the Constitution of the country that he made well before the beginning of the electoral process and has maintained throughout the process.

After the submission of various applications for candidature, the Commission, in accordance with the law, proceeded to review them, after which the files of those candidates who did not meet the eligibility conditions prescribed by law were declared inadmissible. Speaking of only the case of the presidential election, out of the 25 applications registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission, six were not selected. As members of the Council can see, the process has reached cruising speed and is nearing its point of arrival.

Despite the enormous and valuable efforts by the Government and the Commission to obtain the results achieved today, some continue to be sceptical and ask questions, five of which seem particularly important to me and deserve a clarification from our part. Those are questions regarding the voting machines, the 6 million potential voters registered without fingerprints, the financing of the elections, logistics and the easing of the political climate.

As far as the voting machines is concerned, the Commission is aware of the apprehensions that have been raised by some. The Congolese themselves have also raised them. In order to bolster confidence and dispel any doubts, the Commission has undertaken an outreach and awareness-raising campaign on the use of such machines for several months. The campaign, which began with opposition and majority political parties, as well as civil society, continues today in the outlying regions with the rural populations. As we already pointed out to the Council on 26 July, although wrongly called "voting machine", it will not vote in the place of the voter. Its role is to print the ballot that the voter will put into the ballot boxes. In any case, my delegation reassures the Council that remains open and will deliver all the information that the Council would like on the technical aspects related to the use of the machines.

With regard to the 6 million voters registered without fingerprints, the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF), which carried out the audit of the electoral register and noted the situation, made recommendations to improve registration. is working to that end. It is also important to note that the International Organization of the Francophonie emphasized in its conclusions that this situation does not call into question the status of the persons concerned as voters. In that regard, the International Organization of la Francophonie states in its conclusions that

> "The presence of 16.6 per cent of voters without fingerprints throughout the national territory does not, however, call into question their status as voters, in accordance with the law."

It is important to underline here that the audit carried out by IOF demonstrates the will of the Government and the Commission to ensure the transparency of the process for credible elections.

With regard to election financing and logistics, the Government is determined to continue its efforts to make sure that the process takes place on time and to use only funding from the country itself. As we have always stressed, our country remains open to the contributions of other partners, provided that they are without conditions and are respectful of our sovereignty.

Finally, with regard to the easing of the political climate, so as not to go back to the explanations already given in previous statements, it seems important to summarize by saying that the Government has already taken a series of measures to respond to requirements formulated in the 2016 New Year's Eve political agreement in relation to the release of political prisoners. Those who were part of that category have actually been released. The pending cases, so-called emblematic, which we have also often mentioned

before members of the Council, concern people who have committed common law offenses.

Members will agree with us that the public authorities, who are supposed to protect the weakest and promote the rule of law and the equality of citizens before the courts, cannot interfere in that kind of situation without violating the Constitution by creating a double standard of justice in the country.

I would be remiss were I to conclude on this point without coming back to challenges involving those candidates whose candidacies were invalidated. My delegation would like to inform the Council that elections in every country throughout the world are conducted based on an electoral law, which determines the criteria that candidates must meet. The same applies to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is therefore natural that candidates who have not met the prerequisite legal conditions may not run. As some Council members acknowledged, such candidates can file an appeal from now until 19 September before the relevant Court to restore their rights. Should their appeals be rejected, however, my Government would be grateful it the Council and the international community would ask the unfortunate candidates to accept the law to its full extent, the country's laws and the Constitution, as President Kabila has done.

The Congolese people are looking forward to the holding of elections, which, as members know, will take place on 23 December. The Government and the Commission are working to ensure that they are conducted smoothly, transparently and peacefully. That goal can be achieved only with the commitment of all political actors — of every stripe — who must refrain from any type of rhetoric or behaviour that could lead to tensions or public disorder. The Government therefore expects all political actors in the country to support that process constructively through positive actions. The Government expects the same behaviour of international partners. In that regard, my delegation would like to note the following points.

The electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been negatively affected to a great degree by many instances of outside interference — a situation that continues until this day. That state of affairs has hardly moved the process forward and has, among other things, resulted in the postponement of elections, which unfortunately was blamed on a single person — President Kabila. The process has also suffered from the no-confidence crisis fuelled by suspicions instilled in the Congolese people, whereby they doubted themselves and became sceptical of the solemn promise made by the Head of State to respect the Constitution. My delegation believes that the international community, which bears its share of responsibility for that situation, must adopt measured and deliberate language to help dispel the crisis at the process' current stage. The results achieved by the Commission so far must motivate us to trust that institution and allow it to complete its task, while avoiding interference in its work for reasons that pertain more to speculation than reality. Constructive contributions aimed at improving the process are welcome. They must be done in mutual respect among partners.

Lastly, since the fulfilment of the promise made by the Head of State to respect the Constitution, the political situation in the country, as well as at the international level, is enjoying a period of respite. Our wish is to see the situation continue so as to allow, for the first time in the history of our country, a peaceful transition of power at the highest level of the Congolese State. From that perspective, the Congolese Government and people also are also counting on the United Nations, especially the Security Council, the mission of which is to ensure international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.